




COLLEGE
OF THE PACIFIC

WITHDRAWN

13.37
H25

THE VILLAS OF PLINY



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

<https://archive.org/details/villasofplinystu0000unse>



A FEMALE BUST FROM PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA (I)

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

THE VILLAS OF PLINY

A STUDY OF THE PASTIMES OF A ROMAN
GENTLEMAN BY GEOFFREY BRET HARTE



WITH DRAWINGS BY MAX ROEDER
AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS: PRINTED
AT THE SHAKESPEARE HEAD PRESS
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON & PUBLISHED
BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK M·CM·XXVIII

College of the Holy Cross
Stratford, Conn.

PRINTED AND MADE IN ENGLAND AT
THE SHAKESPEARE HEAD PRESS
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

28352

DG
97
H3

P R E F A C E

NOT alone to those who are familiar with the silent streets of Pompeii, and the remains of the once famous port of Ostia, but to all for whom the ruins of the great empire mean more than a lifeless mass of stone, this little study is offered.

For not only as ruler of the earth, and in the grandeur of her monuments, has Rome been predominant, but also in the exquisite refinement of a mode of living.

It is in an effort to portray what a great country villa of a Roman citizen was like two thousand years ago, to evoke its charm and beauty, that this has been written.

The drawings, which have been inspired by the Pliny letters, are by Professor Max Roeder, of the Academy of San Luca in Rome, and have been executed specially for the present work. Professor Roeder has further graciously authorized a reproduction of two of his paintings, the subjects of which make them particularly valuable for illustration.

In extracts from the letters, the version of the Scott edition has been followed to a certain extent, but some passages have been translated by the author.

The author is particularly indebted to the Marchese Bufalini for having been enabled, through his courtesy and hospitality, to visit the exact spot occupied by Pliny's Tuscan villa, as well as for his generous permis-

sion to have photographs made of some of the magnificent Roman busts excavated from there in the sixteenth century. These busts, which are remarkable examples of Greco-Roman sculpture at the highest period of the art, are in an almost perfect state of preservation and have up to the present never been photographed. They are the property of the Marchese Bufalini, and are partly at the Palazzo Bufalini at Città di Castello and partly at his Castle of San Giustino, near to the ancient Pliny estate.

Florence, July 1926.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

A Female Bust from Pliny's Tuscan Villa (i) <i>Frontispiece</i>	
Fantasy of an Abandoned Roman Park. From a Painting by Max Roeder	to face page 4
The Atrium of Pliny's Villa at Laurentium	page 24
The Portico and Summer House of Pliny's Villa at Laurentium. From a Drawing by Max Roeder	34
Sculpture from Pliny's Tuscan Villa	
Bust of a Young Man (ii)	to face page 41
Bust of a Young Man (iii)	42
Bust of a Roman Matron (iv)	46
Head of a Man (v)	48
In a Villa Garden. From a Painting by Max Roeder	to face page 57

THE VILLAS OF PLINY

MAN much more than 'Time,' said a famous French archæologist, 'has destroyed the monuments of the past.' With the closing years of the Roman empire, and the decadence of culture following the advent of Christianity, the race had already lost the sense of art, and the power to create. With the desecration of her pagan monuments in the interest of the new cult, began the destruction which the invasions at the fall of the empire carried beyond description. The Goths and Vandals, our forefathers, half-savage tribes which Roman culture was no longer able to assimilate, achieved this obliteration, and with them disappeared for ever a wealth of art never to be estimated.

During the laborious evolution of the first five hundred years of our own civilization, throughout the blackness of medievalism, this destruction was continued. At the end of the fourteenth century, amid the wars perpetually waged between the powerful brigands who ruled over the Campagna Romana, all public monuments of the ancient empire still in existence, including the tombs, were completely denuded of their remaining decoration and turned into fortresses of defence and refuge. The

The VILLAS of PLINY

treasures they housed, were smashed and utilized for the manufactory of chalk. The works of the greatest sculptors of Greece were sawed into slabs for steps and window-sills, or, when they were not absolutely destroyed, were mutilated beyond recognition under pretext of their pagan origin! Some of the finest masterpieces of Phidias and Praxiteles are said to have perished in this manner. Upon the nomination of Pope Nicholas V in 1447, Rome was little else than a deserted robbers' nest, a mass of dilapidated ruins, safe for no one to venture in after dusk. The population were famished, and wolves had free access into the streets, penetrating even into the gardens of the Vatican.

Such was the aspect of the city which a thousand years previously, with its palaces, baths, theatres, its commerce and its culture, had been the greatest centre of the earth.

With the Humanists of the Renaissance came at last the awakening, and with them started the great movement, not toward the preservation, but toward the imitation of the works of antiquity. This imitation became a veritable fury in every branch of their newly acquired culture, but especially in literature and architecture. However, this was also a period of destruction, for in its haste to create, many magnificent edifices were pulled down to be used as convenient material for the erection of the new. Even so famous a man as the great architect Bramante is not

The VILLAS of PLINY

exempt from this reproach, and it is due to his negligence that the wonderful antique columns of the Constantine Basilica in the Forum have been destroyed. His disregard for the monuments which he imitated was such that he was named by his contemporaries the 'maker of ruins.'

It seems only within the last century that the world has awakened to a sense of the immense value of the treasures which the earth has kept buried beneath her surface until we should be worthy to receive them. Under guidance of celebrated archæologists, and with our modern means of excavation, priceless works of art of ancient Rome are continually being revealed throughout the world. They are the testimony of a culture and perfection which far surpass our previous notions, and which in more ways than one have yet to be attained. Nowhere, of course, is this, to the same degree, so remarkable as at Pompeii. Here an entire city comes to us with houses of all periods, from five hundred years before Christ up to the time of the great eruption. Here, preserved from the fury of the elements and the gluttony and ignorance of mankind, are all the exquisite objects which beautified the homes. Nowhere, excepting perhaps in the House of Diana at Ostia with its wonderful court and two floors intact, does one find domestic architecture so admirably preserved. Through it are revealed not only the plans of the houses but the customs of those who dwelt in them. Alas! with the neces-

The VILLAS of PLINY

sity of transporting the objects they contained to the safe custody of museums, disappears the greatest help to reconstruction. They remain, as houses of to-day would do, devoid of furniture, for future generations who would wish to judge of our way of living.

One does not realize, until one halts before the multitude of objects which these museums contain, how much they tell us of the past. The thousand details of domestic life come to us in fragments. A piece of white or coloured stucco with admirably moulded figures evokes the decoration of walls and ceilings, as do the splendid frescoes and mosaics which are among the only things still to be found where they belong. Exquisite little statuettes, finely wrought jewellery, Alexandrine glass of wonderful hue, marvellous Corinthian vases of a delicacy which modern craft is incapable of creating, all go to form that intimacy of the home of which the owners were so fond. They help to restore the balance in the general conception of the Roman house, with its statues, its marble fountains, its limpid pools and sumptuous courts which lose their coldness to become human and habitable. Yet, for all this wealth of detail, there still remains a void; the absence of the spirit which inhabited them. This spirit has been in a certain measure handed down to us in the literature of the ancients and especially through the letters of Pliny the Younger.

Few have thought to leave posterity a picture of their daily life such as Pliny, through his love of the home, of



FANTASY OF AN ABANDONED ROMAN PARK
FROM A PAINTING BY MAX ROEDER

The VILLAS of PLINY

nature, and his voluntary retirement from the worldly occupations of his contemporaries, has done with such detailed accuracy in his correspondence. None could have been better fitted to do so than this distinguished citizen. In his letters we have delightful descriptions of his pastimes in those two favorite villas: Laurentium and his property in Tuscany.

Here in exquisite surroundings, in the peace of his spacious country home, we see him at work in his Greek and Latin libraries, amid his favorite authors, or conversing with friends in the cool, quiet halls which overlooked on all sides flower-beds, green lawns and fountains. Following him through those gardens which were his especial pride, or on horseback in the alleys of his park, we are struck by his love of nature, so little appreciated by the Romans in general. Indeed one is astonished by the similarity between the life of this Roman of wealth and position and that of a European country gentleman of our day, between two civilizations at two thousand years of interval.

Let us see, before following him any further, what sort of man he was.

Although not of senatorial issue like the great aristocrats whose families, in certain cases, went back to the foundation of the republic, Pliny belonged to the serious and honest provincial nobility settled on the Lake of Como.

The VILLAS of PLINY

Born in 61 after Christ, he lost his father when he was still a boy, and was adopted by his maternal uncle, the famous naturalist, whose name he took in place of his own. This uncle, known to the world as Pliny the Elder, succumbed to the fumes of the great eruption of Vesuvius in 79, in an attempt to rescue friends who had sent for him. Educated under the supervision of the celebrated Virginius Rufus, who refused the empire after Nero, and Quintilian, who was his master of rhetoric, he became a lawyer at the age of twenty. From there he rapidly rose through a succession of important posts to that of military prefect in 98 under Nerva. Two years later he attained the Consulship, and in the year 111, at the age of fifty, the Emperor Trajan elevated him to the dignity of Imperial Legate as Governor of Bithynia, which up to that time had been reserved to those occupying the position of Proconsul. Pliny's administration of this very important province lasted a little over a year, apparently until his death in 113. It throws an interesting light on the manner of government under the empire, and conveys better than anything else the impression of tremendous power wielded by the Cæsars. From his correspondence with the Emperor we see that even the occupant of such a high position as the one held by Pliny dared not accomplish the smallest detail beyond the routine of his daily work without first obtaining the august consent. In the hands of a ruler so just as the

The VILLAS of PLINY

Emperor Trajan, only good could come of it, but one shudders to think of the reverse, when a Nero or Commodus was master of the world.

Pliny was without doubt one of the most highly educated and refined of the ancient Romans; and at the bar was considered one of the greatest pleaders of his age. A distinguished man of letters, his interest and knowledge of literature was unparalleled, and made of him a fervent lover of books. Everywhere he went, they accompanied him, in or out of doors, at home or on his travels. Even when hunting, they are the guarantee that his day will not be wasted, even if the sport is bad. Among his intimate friends we find all the prominent authors of his day, including the great historians, Suetonius and Tacitus.

The comparison so often made between his letters and those of Cicero is in reality a forced one, as their times were in no way similar, and except in his own estimation and that of his wife, Pliny had none of the genius of the great orator. His letters have none of the former's free and easy charm. They were written to be published, and the style, to which great attention had been paid in the originals, was still further revised in his moments of leisure in the country, before they were definitely set aside for posterity. They have, however, quite another importance, in the fact that they throw an entirely different light upon a society which up to the present we have too readily judged from the lurid satire of Juvenal

The VILLAS of PLINY

and most of the great writers of his day. That such a life as the satirists described existed at the court of the corrupt Cæsars, as at many other epochs, there is little doubt, but it would be ridiculous to form an opinion of the whole nation from it. On the contrary, from this correspondence, we have an insight into the lives of that class of serious and noble-minded aristocrats whose austerity and culture formed the background of the Empire, even in the worst years. It is this which forms their chief interest in the present work, although the letters themselves are often masterpieces in which most delicate thoughts are blended in a language of perfect form.

Pliny possessed all the attributes of a country gentleman. Kind and generous, interested in all pertaining to nature, his keen sensitiveness has detected and appreciated the more delicate shades of life. His generosity is proverbial, and we shall see later with what consummate tact he accomplished the most difficult tasks. That he had a very large fortune is evident, yet, in comparison with the vast wealth of others in his station of life, he felt justified in speaking of his own as moderate. His scrupulous honesty prevented him from amassing those incredible sums which others extracted in an amazingly short time from the high positions of the State.

Into his daily life Pliny seems to have brought that same moderation, preferring quiet simplicity and refinement

The VILLAS of PLINY

in his surroundings, to the excess of luxury in the homes of many of his contemporaries. In the treatment of his slaves he revealed himself to be a great humanitarian, showing them the affection and solicitude of a father, and bequeathing after his death several million sesterces for the support of his freedmen.

II

PLINY'S estates were vast and considerable in number. He seems to have shared the preference of most of the Romans for all that was near the water. On the Lake of Como alone, he possessed, as he himself confesses, 'several villas,' how many we do not know. Two in particular held a fascination for him, and are the object of a charming letter to Romanus, in which he explains the reason of his choice. 'One is perched on the rocks,' he writes, 'as at Baiæ, overlooking the lake, the other, also as at Baiæ, is on the water's edge. So I like to call the one Tragedy, and the other Comedy, the former because it is supported as it were by the buskin, and the latter by the sock. Each has its own charm, and seems the pleasanter when one lives in it, by reason of its difference from the other.'

The Tragedia stood on the promontory now covered by the grounds of the Villa Serbelloni, and those who have visited that beautiful spot, and seen the view which lies at its feet, will understand his love for it. It stood as

The VILLAS of PLINY

he said high above the lake, from where one could look down upon the fishermen beneath, just as to-day between the heavy foliage one sees far below on the limpid waters the little row-boats lingering between the rocks, in some shady nook.

The villa which occupied the curve of the little bay on the water's edge, which in its peaceful and smiling contrast he named the 'Comedia,' probably stood near Lenno. The level of the lake being much higher at present than at the time of the Romans, the place where it was situated is now far beneath the surface. Boatmen pretend that on a clear day remains are still to be seen. From its windows, 'almost from one's bed,' Pliny writes, 'one can fish as from a little boat.' Here were long level gardens touching the water, where he could enjoy the restful beauty of the lake. Of his other properties on its shores he does not speak, but there is no doubt that at Como, which was his birthplace, he owned land as well. He possessed large estates at Tifernum, on the way from the Apennines to Rome, as well as villas at the three fashionable resorts of Tusculum, Præneste and Tibur. The latter, which is the present Tivoli, was in particular much favored by the wealthy Romans, being a spot of great beauty yet easy of access, and a refuge in summer from the great heat of the city. It will always be famous as the site of the fantastic palace which the Emperor Hadrian erected there in A.D. 134 and which has been

The VILLAS of PLINY

justly called the 'Versailles' of the Cæsars. However, all these properties were surbordinate, in Pliny's eyes, to the charm of his Tuscan estate, which seems to have been the most beautiful in his possession, and which, in addition to the elegance and vast proportions of the villa itself, had gardens of rare beauty. Pliny admits that he prefers it to all others, with the exception of his home at Laurentium, which was his favorite. They are the two properties that form the subject of Pliny's famous letters to Gallus and Apollinaris, and which on many occasions throughout past centuries architects and dreamers have attempted to reconstruct.

Laurentium was the name of a little town by the sea around which were grouped many other villas than the one Pliny owned there. It was only about twelve miles from Rome, and a short distance separated it from the great port of Ostia, which ranked among the most important cities of the Empire. The whole site of what was once Laurentium, including Pliny's property, now forms part of the vast estate of Castel Porziano, belonging to the King of Italy. Thanks to the solitude and wilderness which surround these ruins, they still convey a powerful suggestion of the past. It is unfortunate, however, that excavations seem to have been executed only very summarily, as many treasures lie no doubt still buried beneath the forest; and who knows that it might not still be possible to discover and identify the actual remains of the

The VILLAS of PLINY

villa which Pliny has so minutely described? Following him along the sandy lane which led to this estate, let us first see what a Roman villa of his time was like, and what kind of life one led within it.

The only examples of Roman domestic architecture that have come down to us in any state of preservation are those of Pompeii and other cities, which in spite of their spacious inner courts, were built for the exigencies of a town life, while here we have on the contrary to deal with great country houses. Yet villas of this period, whether in the city or in the country, were all built according to certain preconceived ideas which had their origin in the oldest Roman habitations, and consisted in the grouping of the entire living quarters around a central space called the atrium. The most primitive Roman constructions consisted, indeed, only of huts in which one room served all purposes of existence, in which one cooked and ate and slept. A hole in the roof to allow the smoke of the fire to escape completed this 'living room' and would appear to have been the origin of the atrium. However, as far back as five hundred years before Christ the atrium was already established in its definite form, that of a partially covered court in the middle of which stood a large marble basin called the impluvium, made to receive the rain-water which fell through an opening of equal space in the roof. There were three kinds of atrium used by the Romans, the oldest and best known

The VILLAS of PLINY

being the Tuscan, which Pliny names 'ex more veterum,' in the manner of the ancients. The roof, which slanted towards the middle on all four sides, was supported by beams crossed at right angles, and fixed in the walls. Many houses in Pompeii had this.

The others were the Corinthian atrium, where the roof was upheld by a series of Corinthian columns, giving it the appearance of a small Grecian peristylum, as at the house of Rufus at Pompeii, and the tetrastyle atrium, rarest and perhaps most charming of all in effect, where instead of eight or ten, were only four great pillars, one at each corner of the impluvium. Houses of any size frequently had two or more of these interior courts, a big and a smaller one in different styles.

Around the impluvium, and in between the columns, tables were placed, and beautiful statues, works of the finest Grecian artists, reflected themselves in its still waters.

In summer when the heat of the sun, even through this small opening, made these courts too warm, big awnings made of white or purple velum were stretched across, and flooded the atrium with their diffused and softened light. The floors and sometimes also the walls were covered in mosaic representing a variety of subjects, mostly mythological, also executed by the Greeks.

The atrium had played in the past, more than in the time of Pliny, a rôle of the utmost importance in the

The VILLAS of PLINY

Roman house, by reason of its religious significance. It was the abiding place of the domestic divinities, who watched over, and protected from all evil, the home and those who dwelt within its walls. They were the invisible inhabitants whose aid and intercession were sought in all the great events of the family life, at birth as at death, and partook with them of every joy and of every grief. They were treated with great respect, and offerings were made regularly before their images. These divinities were Vesta, the goddess of the hearth-fire, light and fuel; the Penates, gods of the provisions; and the Lares, guardians of the household.

With the exception of the Penates, whose rôle will be seen later on, they had their altars in little niches around the atrium. Near their images, and confident in their presence among them, the family, from the father to the humblest of the slaves, gathered in moments of peace, as in moments of anguish. Faith in this beautiful tradition was one of the greatest pillars of Roman domestic life, representing as it did the solidarity of the family under the paternal roof. Grecian philosophy and the importation of fastuous luxury in the last century before Christ did much to weaken this belief, as it did for all the admirable principles which had been the stronghold of the Roman people throughout so many centuries. In this manner, little by little, the importance of the atrium was in itself diminished, and it became subsequently a kind

The VILLAS *of* PLINY

of hall sumptuously decorated, in which strangers were received, and where the man of business or lawyer received his clients. Around this atrium were situated a certain number of rooms opening out on to it, and in the case of town houses deriving therefrom all their light and air, having frequently no windows overlooking the street. One entered the house through a narrow passage, called the porticus, which led directly into the atrium. At the other end, up a few steps was a big room, the tablinum, in which were kept the archives of the family. In the smaller houses it was sometimes used as a drawing-room or banquet chamber on great occasions. It had often on two sides no dividing walls, being separated from the atrium by heavy curtains. On the other side of this room and continuing straight through the house one came to the peristylum, which was a great open court, surrounded by columns. These columns supported a narrow roof, forming a covered pathway on all sides, very similar to a cloister. Of entirely Greek conception, the peristylum was adopted by the Romans in their domestic architecture at the beginning of the empire. The court was often very big, especially in country houses, and in the palace of Domitian covered an area of ten thousand square feet. Frequently, transformed into luxuriant gardens, filled with flowers, in which great fountains poured out their limpid waters, it took the name of Viridarium. Sometimes in the middle was a swimming

The VILLAS of PLINY

pool, where the occupants of the house could keep themselves cool on the hot summer days. Marble and bronze statues and statuettes ornamented these charming spots, which served as the private quarters of the family, where none but intimate friends ever penetrated. Around this vast enclosure were all the reception rooms of these villa-palaces. Dining halls, 'triclinia,' and drawing-rooms, æcus and exedra, opened out their doors on to these little gardens of Eden, where even in town the owners could enjoy all the beauties of nature in the intimacy of their homes.

The Romans seem to have been very fond of these courts, and in Pompeii, where the houses are rarely big, and never of the vast proportions of big country estates, there are frequently several under the same roof. The House of the Faun, the oldest and one of the most beautiful of the buried city, has two atria, and two open courts, in the centre of one of which is a swimming pool, while the other is a garden.

This profusion of courts and rooms is characteristic of the mode of living of the time, when the wealthy Roman had an infinity of rooms for the same purpose, to be used according to the season, time of day, weather, or simply the caprice of the master.

Dining-rooms, especially, were abundant. Every Roman house possessed at least two, a summer and a winter one, the former opening out on to a garden, the lat-

The VILLAS of PLINY

ter more intimate and easier to heat, overlooking the atrium. In the great country houses, where space was of no consequence, there were triclinia of all shapes and sizes, open and closed, with and without roofs, sunny and shady, some for the master alone or a few intimate friends, others for those perpetual banquets which for many Romans were the chief form of entertainment. Pliny, who prides himself on the simplicity of his living, had a bewildering variety of them. What must have been the house of a Lucullus?

The reader knows, no doubt, the disposition of these triclinia, where one ate reclining on couches, three of which formed the triclinium, as the name implies. The centre one was placed in width against the wall, the others jutting out at right angles. Each couch was inclined upwards towards the centre, and held three guests; the table accommodating in this way nine people. At banquets and in the bigger halls, there were several of these tables in the same room. Under no circumstances, however, were there ever more than nine at each, as it was considered the height of discourtesy to place four upon a couch. In the centre of the space formed by the couches, stood the table on which were placed the food and wine. These dining halls were twice as long as they were wide, the upper end being used for the tables, and the lower for the service.

In order to appreciate the advantages of the tricli-

The VILLAS of PLINY

nium, one must remember that at meal time, especially in the hours set aside for the *cena*, that last repast of the day, the Romans combined repose, refreshment and diversion. It often lasted late into the evening and there were frequent intervals for entertainments of one kind or another. For some it was the dancing of boys and girls from distant lands, either professionals or slaves of great beauty, often obtained at fabulous sums for their grace and beauty. Others were charmed by the music of the flutes, or the recital of some poem, which Pliny, in his letter to Septicius Clarus, humorously mentions as one of the delightful features the latter had missed in not having dined with him as he had promised.

Let us see what awaited him at Pliny's table, but first in what manner he was invited. If it was in Rome, or to a neighbouring estate, the Roman host sent his vocator, a servant whose special mission was to summon guests to his table. The guest, who came in a costume of brilliant colour, called the *synthesis*, was accompanied by his own attendant, who brought both the traditional napkin and his master's indoor slippers. He was waited on exclusively by this attendant, who stood by him throughout the meal, and carried him home afterwards, when it was necessary. In this particular instance, the guest did not turn up, so that we are fortunate enough to know what Pliny had prepared for him.

'A lettuce and three snails apiece,' he writes, 'with

The VILLAS of PLINY

barley water, some sweet wine and snow, (the snow you shall most certainly pay for, as it melted in the dish!), olives, beets, gourds, shalots and a hundred other little delicacies equally sumptuous. You should have been entertained either with an interlude, the recital of a poem, or a piece of music, as you liked best, or to all three, as I am such a lavish host. But you preferred to dine elsewhere, — where I do not know, — on oysters and sea-urchins, and to watch Spanish dancing-girls.'

Yes, no doubt he missed a great deal, for a supper with Pliny must have been a rare combination of brilliant conversation and delicate fare. Except for the snails, which were considered a great delicacy, its simplicity forms a striking contrast to the extravagance of food usually found in the homes of the wealthy, to which Pliny jokingly alludes in his letter.

This extravagance had no limits, and seems to have still further increased with the prosperity of the first century. The French culinary art of the eighteenth century had more grace but no wilder follies. Peacocks' brains, nightingales' tongues and rare species of birds were among the preferences, and anything that was difficult to obtain, or that came from distant lands was considered a delicacy. In days when no faster means of conveyance existed than sails on the sea and horses on land, these old epicures did not hesitate to have oysters brought from England, and other specialties from Asia,

The VILLAS of PLINY

and the ingenuity of the means of transport was equalled only by their gluttony. Horne, from whose fascinating work on Pompeii, *The Mirage of Two Buried Cities*, these details have been taken, tells us how the oysters were transported, packed in compressed snow, whereas for the rare species of fish caught in distant oceans, perforated wooden boxes were made and tied to the vessel's keel in which they could be kept alive. On land fish were carried in tubs by porters, and upon arrival were shown alive to the guests, before being delivered into the hands of the cook. Sword-fish, sea wolves and other rare fish were added to those we are in the habit of eating, and as for the meats, from the roasts of wild boar, hunted in their own forests, to the suckling pigs of their farms, the Romans enjoyed all the refinements of which we are proud.

These dishes were, however, often prepared in ways of which we might not always approve, and even at Pliny's table there were delicacies we might not relish as he did.

It is interesting to note that the Romans possessed no sugar, and, as in Africa to-day, everything was sweetened with wild honey. The cooking otherwise was done as it still is in Italy, with oil instead of butter, and those fruits which we most closely associate with that country, at least in the south, such as oranges and lemons, were not grown in Italy at the time of which we write.

These dinners were conducted according to a certain ritual, and consisted, not unlike our modern meals,

The VILLAS *of* PLINY

of three distinct courses. The first, consisting of oysters and other shell fish, highly spiced to sharpen the appetite, with egg-salad and olives, formed a kind of 'hors-d'œuvre.' The second consisted of fish and meat, while the third was a dessert of fruit and pastry. To all appearances this would seem an excellent but not exaggerated repast, and such no doubt it was at the triclinium of Pliny. A closer examination, however, will show how admirably it lent itself to be embroidered upon, extravagance having plenty of scope in the fact that each of these courses, especially the second, could be divided into as many separate ones as could be wished. Thus after every kind of hors-d'œuvre first mentioned, came lobsters and crabs, followed by hares, squirrels, peacocks, water-hens, partridges, different roasts and all manner of fowls, sausages, of which the Romans were very fond, stuffed rats and grasshoppers prepared in various ways. All this was copiously covered with sauces which would no doubt have ruined our more delicate digestions, as the strongest peppers, aromatic herbs, vinegar and entrails of dried fish mixed with wine, all well fermented, seem to have been the base of them. This was followed by eggs and peaches and other fruit, then came all kinds of vegetables, chiefly asparagus and artichokes, all under the title of second course.

It is not surprising that having reached this stage the guests should have felt the need of a pause, during which

The VILLAS of PLINY

offerings were made to the Lares and Penates, those domestic divinities of which we have already spoken. This ceremony consisted in placing before their images small portions of each dish which had been partaken of, in addition to a sacramental offering of a special salted cake.

During this pause, slaves passed around bowls of perfumed water and essences, with which the guests bathed their faces and sprinkled their hair. Then they proceeded to the dessert, with toasted cheeses, cakes made with honey and various fruits.

Throughout the meal, wine already mixed with water in great pitchers was passed from guest to guest by a special cup-bearer, who served it to them by means of a certain measure, which enabled them to know exactly how much they had absorbed. The drinking was begun in earnest usually only when the feast was over, and the best of whatever entertainments were afforded took place at that time. Flowers and aromatic herbs were distributed around the tables to counteract by their perfume the strength of the wines.

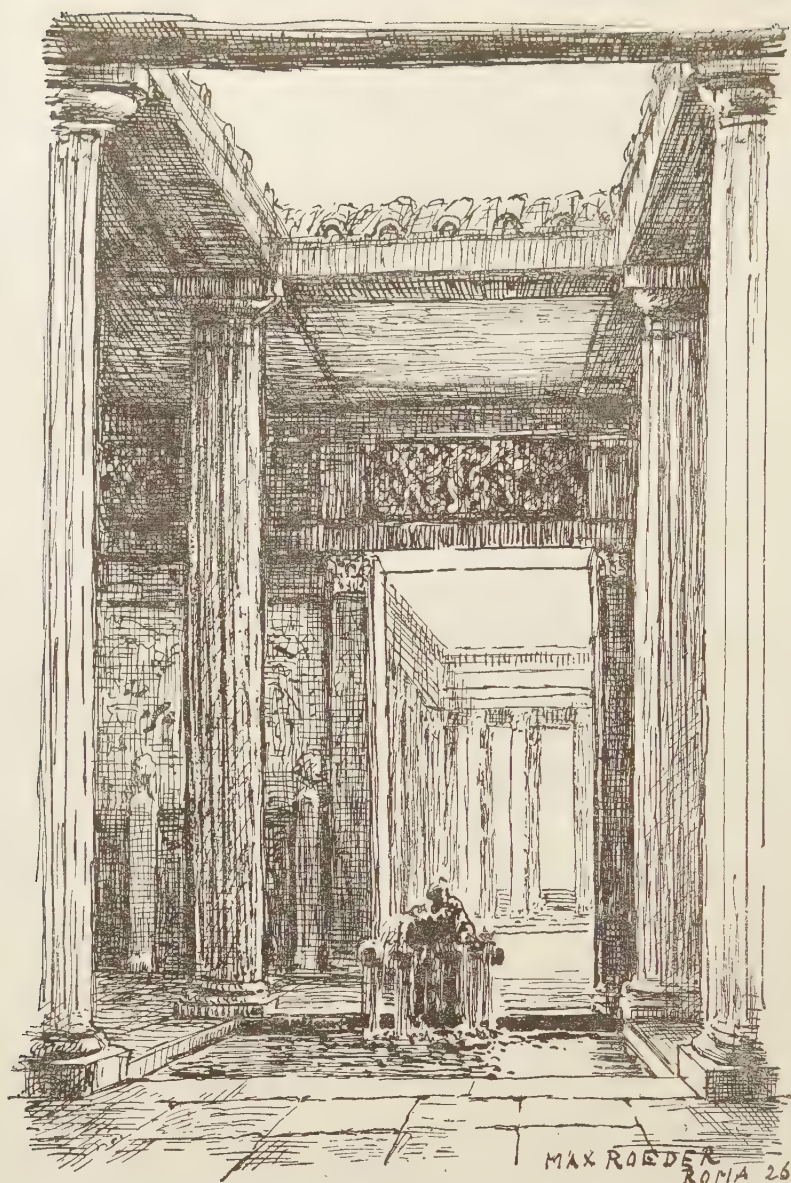
It is quite understandable that such banquets lasted often from three in the afternoon, the usual hour of the cena, until late in the evening, and could only take place in surroundings of the greatest comfort.

This picture, which no doubt was no exaggeration in the houses of those wealthy and ostentatious freedmen so common under the Roman empire, or in the sump-

The VILLAS of PLINY

tuous villas of some degenerate aristocrat, would give an entirely wrong conception of the life led by the honest and conscientious class of men of which Pliny and his friends are examples. Although certainly not in want of anything that could add to the comfort and beauty of his life, considering the position of the man as a senator and the intimate friend of the Emperor Trajan, we cannot help appreciating the frugality and moderation of his existence compared with that led by others of much less importance than Pliny.

But let us return to Laurentium, to this favorite villa, which being only seventeen miles from Rome was the nearest of access of all his properties. The sandy lane into which one turned from the high road to Ostia, soon leads to it. If somewhat tiring by carriage, it was, he tells us, easy and pleasant on horseback, and was certainly not lacking in charm, through woods and pasture land, with grazing cattle from the mountains. In truth Laurentium was scarcely an estate, being the smallest of his possessions, and was, according to his own description, of little expense to maintain. A French architect of the eighteenth century, Flavien des Aveux, very ingeniously reconstructed the plans of this villa, which although charming in effect, had no doubt not the remotest resemblance to the original. They were drawn with the symmetrical regularity so fundamental to the architecture of the period, and so completely disdained by the Roman people in the building of their homes.



THE ATRIUM OF PLINY'S VILLA AT LAURENTIUM

The VILLAS of PLINY

As the famous French archæologist, Gaston Boissier, justly remarks, our first impression, if we could see the villas of Pliny as they stood, would be one of surprise at the multiplicity of edifices of all shapes and sizes joined together in the same house. The Romans preferred originality in their rooms, giving each one a different outlook, rather than sacrifice their comfort to an external symmetry of line. We must not forget also, that Pliny had a numerous household to lodge. His family, it is true, consisted only of his wife and himself, but, beside them and the continual passing of friends, there remained a little court of freedmen, secretaries, doctors, comedians, actors, intendants of his property, and, beyond these, a great number of slaves. A man of his condition possessed easily twenty five or thirty thousand slaves, possibly more, who belonged more or less to his estates. Even if he had only a very moderate number attached to his villa at Laurentium, they required to be looked after. The humanitarian sentiments of Pliny are well known, and he was proud that the quarters allotted them were for the most part 'sufficiently well furnished to receive guests.'

The architects had delighted their master with all kinds of rooms and little pavilions, in semi-circles, affording in winter the maximum of sunshine, and shade on the hottest days of summer. Views on all sides delighted the eyes, here to the ocean, there to the woods, on one side overlooking a little flower-bed, or a fountain, on

The VILLAS of PLINY

the other an avenue of trees. All this would not have been possible according to the plans of des Aveux, and could only have presented from the outside something of the aspect of a little village. Since we have no description of the exterior, let us penetrate into the house. A few steps up through an entrance hall and we enter the atrium. In country houses it did not have the importance which it still maintained in the city, and a great peristylum often replaced it as centre of the living quarters. Pliny, in any case, does not attribute much importance to this one, saying only that it was simple but dignified. We do not know therefore whether it was a Tuscan atrium, or whether the impluvium was surrounded by columns in the Corinthian or tetrastyle fashion. An impluvium there was, in any event, for here the rain-water was more necessary than in any of his other places, as here there were none of the springs, the abundance of which formed the charm of his Tuscan estate, nor a lake as conveniently situated as at Como. This atrium no doubt resembled those of the Pompeian houses already described, but was smaller and more austere in its appointments: no less charming, however, in effect, with its flowers and statuettes around its limpid pool of water.

At the other end, facing the entrance, one passed into an open space surrounded by a semi-circular portico, the windows and overhanging eaves of which protected it against wind and rain. The eaves were supported by pil-

The VILLAS of PLINY

lars, which must have been very effective and graceful in appearance, especially when through the centre of them one passed into the great court beyond. Around this vast enclosure most of the living quarters of the villa were assembled. Crossing this main court, we come to a large dining-room, or, more correctly speaking, a long one, the opposite end of which projected out towards the ocean, 'so that when the south-west wind drives the sea shoreward, it is just washed by the edge of the last breakers.' At this extremity was a big bow window from which one could overlook the water on all sides. When seated with one's back to this expanse of ocean, an entirely different view presented itself, which was no less admirable. Looking through the great court paved in mosaics, and in between the slender columns of the portico into the atrium beyond, one saw, framed in the doorway of the entrance, the woods and hills in the distance.

What a vision at sunset, or at dusk, on those long summer evenings which Pliny loved to spend in conversation with his friends and freedmen, after the cena ! Very different these meals must have been from the drunken orgies into which developed the banquets we have attempted to describe. Pliny's fare was always of the simplest, but equal for all at his table. It was well known and generally admitted that different qualities of food and wine were served to the guests according to their

The VILLAS of PLINY

rank. How little this was to Pliny's liking, is to be seen from his interesting and curious letter to Avitus. 'It would be a long story', he writes, 'and it is of no importance, to tell you how I came to be dining — for I am no particular friend of his — with a man who thought he combined elegance with economy, but who appeared to me to be both mean and lavish, for he set the best dishes before himself and a few others and treated the rest to cheap and scrappy food. He had apportioned the wine in small decanters of three different kinds, not in order to give his guests their choice but so they might not refuse. He had one kind for himself and us, another for his less distinguished friends and a third for his own freedmen and those of his guests.' He goes on to relate how he prefers his own habit of treating all his guests on an equal footing, and his freedmen as well, 'for I invite my friends to dine, not to grade them one above the other', and it is not without a certain dry humour that he recommends his young friend, at the end of it, to avoid this new combination of extravagance and meanness: 'they are abominable qualities when separated and single, and are still more so when you get a combination of them.'

To the left of this dining-room were two living-rooms, one big and the other small. They had windows to the rising and setting sun, through which one could also see the ocean, but from further away, and forming with the

The VILLAS of PLINY

projection of the dining hall an angle which sheltered them from all winds. Melmoth's translation mentions them as drawing-rooms, which they were not. The Latin text calls them *cubicula*, and not *exedrae*, and they were more the simple living-rooms that were used for various purposes, whereas the *exedra* was reserved for the special purpose of music or singing. As Pliny says, they were delightful refuges in winter, on account of their heat, and were used sometimes as a gymnasium for his household. From there one passed into the library, which formed one corner of the villa. Like the portico, it was semi-circular, and presented an enormous bow window to every ray of sunshine. Book-cases were sunk into the walls opposite, filled as he tells us not with those books which one reads once, but with those which can never be enjoyed too often. One can well imagine this bright and cheerful room, flooded with light, with its beautiful outlook, on one side to the garden, on the other to the sea, where Pliny kept his favorite authors, and studied them at leisure. Above them, in little niches, probably stood their busts, in the Greco-Roman fashion, and the position of these cases was no doubt in accordance with the rules of Vitruvius, that books should be turned towards the morning sun. In narrow oblong boxes, tightly rolled, lay these manuscripts, in Greek and Latin. Next to this study were the private apartments of his wife Calpurnia, and his own, which enjoyed the last

The VILLAS of PLINY

word in central heating. This invention, of which he was justly proud, consisted of an overhead hot-air system, a little like our most modern notions, and tempered the rooms in a most agreeable manner. When we consider the laborious progress of invention, and the intense discomfort in which people lived, not only in medieval times, but during the Renaissance, and in the eighteenth century, and to-day on many of the country estates of Europe, it is with wonder that one looks back upon the consummate luxury and refinement with which the Romans surrounded themselves in their homes.

These rooms, generally known as *zothecæ*, were small and only used to sleep in. The greater part of them were occupied by large beds, made of bronze, richly inlaid with silver, raised a few steps above the level of the floor, and very comfortably upholstered.

‘The remainder of this side of the house,’ says Pliny, ‘is appropriated to the use of my slaves and freedmen, most of the rooms being sufficiently well furnished for the reception of guests.’ How few modern hosts could boast of as much!

Returning to the dining-room and beginning on the other side of the court, one came first to a very big hall, with much the same outlook, which on account of its size could be used as a council chamber in which the entire household could be assembled on certain occasions. Next to this were two more rooms, a big and a

The VILLAS of PLINY

smaller one, which, having both very high ceilings, were especially used in summer. And as no Roman villa of any importance was complete without its baths, so the villa of Laurentium possessed its, and very charming ones at that.

Apart from the Thermæ, which were and are still to-day unique in the world, the ruins of which, in spite of the various reconstructions designed by celebrated architects, give only a faint idea of their ancient splendour; there existed no less than nine hundred private thermæ in the city of Rome alone. Among these, the villas of Mæcenæ, Sallustius, Livia and Agrippina possessed the most famous, while outside Rome, the best known are the two which Hadrian erected for his own use at the great summer palace of Tibur.

Those of Laurentium were perhaps not so big, but were complete according to the Grecian rules, including among the various rooms the frigidarium, tepidarium and calidarium, the hypocauston, baptisterium, piscinæ, unctorium and sphæristerium. All this sounds very complicated; on the contrary it was quite simple, as we shall see on entering.

First came the apodyterium which was the dressing-room where one disrobed before passing into the unctorium, where expert attendants, 'unguentarii', massaged the bathers with perfumed oil and special pomades, conserved in little alabaster vases. Thus anointed, one passed

The VILLAS of PLINY

into the frigidarium, or cold room, which at Laurentium, according to Pliny's description, was of spacious proportions. Sunk into the floor, and jutting out in a semi-circle from the opposite sides of the room, were two marble pools filled with cold running water. It was customary for the Romans, as for the Greeks, to begin with the cold bath before passing into the tepid and hot rooms. The tepidarium was particularly attractive. Very big, it occupied two rooms, forming a sort of gallery, along one side of which ran an immense swimming pool of warm water. Above this were arches through which one could watch the ocean while bathing, and enjoy in winter, on account of its temperature, the illusion of outdoor bathing.

Of the hot room, calidarium, he does not speak, except to say that the hypocauston which was the furnace that heated it, was adjoining instead of below the floor as usual, and it is probable that this room had full exposure to the sun.

On leaving this, one re-entered the tepid and cold room, and having in this manner accomplished again the three degrees of the bath, one entered into a large covered court for exercise; that was the Sphæristarium. Various kinds of sport took place here. In the public Thermæ, and among the lower classes, wrestling was greatly in favor, and the magnificent mosaics of the thermæ of Caracalla form an interesting history of the

The VILLAS of PLINY

different poses and rules according to which these matches were conducted. A numerous audience always attended them, and they were considered as a public spectacle, similar to the gladiatorial fights of the Coliseum. It is probable that Pliny, like most of the great 'seigneurs' of his time, had among his household many athletes and organized for their benefit private wrestling bouts, at which he and his friends assisted. The grace of these youths has been for sculptors of all epochs and of all nations an inspiration for their best work.

When, however, Pliny took exercise, it was of milder nature and more in keeping with his personality. Squash rackets was played throughout the empire, as it still is in America to-day, and as tennis is throughout the world; and it is probable that Pliny was a good hand at it. All this took place in the sphæristerium, which was ingeniously considered as part of the baths. While here, it would not be inappropriate to recall the primordial importance which these thermæ held in the life of the people. No more magnificent donation could be conceived than that which Caracalla gave to the population of Rome in A.D. 212; and all had access to this vast edifice, in which were assembled, in a setting worthy of them, the greatest works of art of antiquity. Marble of every hue, some of which can no longer be obtained, the most precious alabaster, and mosaics, adorned the floors and walls, and formed the background for the master-

The VILLAS of PLINY

pieces of sculpture which for centuries have been taken from them. Visits to the Vatican museums and the great national collections of Europe give one an idea of



THE PORTICO AND SUMMER HOUSE OF PLINY'S
VILLA AT LAURENTIUM

the incredible wealth of art and beauty which these *Thermæ* contained.

All found an appeal in them, on account of the different functions which they fulfilled. Apart from the actual baths and the grounds for exercise, there remained with-

The VILLAS of PLINY

in the vast enclosure shady alleys for the philosophers and those who wished to attend their courses, theaters at the disposal of any author who desired to recite or perform before an audience his latest poem or tragedy. In winter when the days were too cold to linger out of doors, the people at large collected within the enormous tepidarium, in which reigned eternal spring, and friends met on business or pleasure. The Thermæ of Caracalla were for the repose and recreation of an empire, and nothing had been too lavish or too precious for their splendour. One can well imagine therefore that the private baths of these sumptuous villas, being for the exclusive use of the most exacting masters, were gems of elegance and refinement, and that a place of honor was accorded them in the construction of their homes.

In the same part of the house were two towers. The first contained two apartments on the ground floor and two above, while the other had below a bedroom a wine cellar and a granary. Above this was a dining-room, which, on account of its position, much further back from the sea, was a pleasant change from the one we first saw upon entering the villa. Here, Pliny writes, in the roughest weather one could only faintly hear the roar of the ocean in the distance. It overlooked a garden enclosed by an alley of boxwood, and filled with fruit trees and flowers. Behind these towers were two other apartments overlooking the entrance to the villa, and on the side a

The VILLAS of PLINY

kitchen garden. This seems to have completed the main house, but from here a long covered gallery led to a little summer house where far away from every one Pliny could retire when he wished to be alone. This portico had windows on either side, on the left toward the sea, and on the right looking out on the garden. They could be completely removed in summer, forming a long open colonnade on either side of which ran a wide bed of violets, so that the passage through it was always fragrant with their perfume. In summer with the breeze from the sea, and in winter with the sun through its high windows, this gallery was alternately a shady summer porch and a protected sun parlour. The pavilion to which it led was Pliny's favorite spot. It was in itself a complete little house having all that was required for one's comfort and happiness. On the left when entering, was a winter room, called by the Romans 'heliocaminus', heated by the sun, a kind of veranda with windows all around, next to which was another room having at its extremity an alcove, separated by a portière. This alcove had a couch, two chairs, and three windows. 'As you lie on the couch,' he writes, 'you have the sea at your feet, the villa at your back, and the woods at your head, and all these views may be looked at separately from each window or blended into one prospect.' There were three other rooms, one of them being impenetrable to the sound of the slaves, the murmur of the sea, the raging of storms, flashes of light-

The VILLAS of PLINY

ning or even daylight. This was achieved in a curious manner. A wide empty corridor surrounded the room on all sides, separating it from any direct contact with the outer walls of the pavilion, and this isolated space absorbed all sound which might have reached it. A little furnace enabled the place to be heated in cold weather. Here, if nowhere else, Pliny was sure to find absolute quiet on the feast days which his slaves and household were accorded full liberty to celebrate in the most joyous fashion. 'When I withdraw to this pavilion,' his letter continues, 'it is as though I were far from my house, and I find a great charm in it at the time of the Saturnalia, when the rest of my villa is given up to the joys of feasting, and resonant with the clamour of voices. Therefore,' he adds in his charming way, 'I do not disturb the amusements of my servants, and they do not interfere with my studies.'

Here ends Pliny's description of Laurentium. There was only one drawback to this delightful property, and that was the absence of running water. All the household needs, including the reserve for the baths, had to be drawn from wells. Otherwise everything else was near at hand. The proximity of the forest was a guaranty of an abundance of wood, and the town of Ostia was a conveniently near shopping centre for all that his estate could not supply. 'Even for a man of simple tastes,' he writes, 'the village, which is separated from my house only by a

The VILLAS of PLINY

villa, is quite sufficient. There are three public baths, which are very convenient if one's sudden arrival or too short stay make it not worth while to heat one's own.'

All around were beautiful estates, the houses of which, owing to their vast proportions and rambling effect, produced either from the sea or from land the impression of a little village.

It is regrettable that neither here nor in his description of his Tuscan villa does Pliny give us any details of the decoration or furniture, which would be so precious to us. The rooms and courts were paved in mosaics, out of doors usually in black and white, while in the interior of the house they were generally in colour. Each room, according to its purpose, lent itself as an inspiration for a wealth of design in the warmest tones. Magnificent Persian rugs and carpets, imported from the Orient, as well as skins of animals, were thrown over them in winter, and made these rooms warm and habitable. The whole tone of the Roman villa was one of warmth, and tended towards the intimacy of the home, especially in those quarters where the family resided. This was carried out to a great degree by the beautiful frescos which covered the walls of almost every chamber, and which are too famous to require detailed description. It was an art the Romans were past masters of, and the marvellous freshness of colouring they have kept, even in the fragments exposed to the elements throughout twenty centuries,

The VILLAS of PLINY

testify to the perfection of technic as well as to the art of those who executed them. Even a certain knowledge of the process seems to have perished with them, and is likely to remain for ever a secret. The walls of the big apartments were also frequently hung with magnificent Babylonian tapestries, greatly admired by the Romans. These tapestries, the weird and beautiful designs of which are still to be seen in the fragments from Egyptian tombs, were used as portières and great curtains to separate the apartments from one another. The furniture, mostly of Greek origin, resembled in form and decoration the style of the first French Empire, which copied it, and the contents of a house of the Napoleonic period might not have been out of place in a Roman villa.

Laurentium was for Pliny chiefly a residence for spring and for winter when it was possible for him to escape the busy life of Rome. This was partly due to its proximity to the city, on occasions when only a flying visit was possible. Later, too, its climate made it a delightful place of sojourn in the months before the torrid heat of summer forced him to seek the higher altitudes of his Tuscan property, or the cooler climate of the north. He contrasts the tranquillity and leisure of Laurentium with the dissipation of Rome. It was there he wrote, 'I neither hear nor say anything of which later I might repent: . . . no hopes nor fears to worry me, no rumours to disturb my rest.' There were, however, other reasons

The VILLAS of PLINY

why he was so fond of it, and not the least important of them was that, being very small, the property did not burden him, as elsewhere, with the worries and supervision of a big estate, and he was free to devote his time to his literary studies. In a letter to Julius Naso he writes, 'It has hailed on my Tuscan estates; from my domain beyond the Po I derive nothing unless everything is abundant. . . My villa at Laurentium is the only one from which I draw a revenue. I possess there, it is true, only a house and gardens besides the beach, and yet it is from there only that I derive anything, because I write a great deal and cultivate, not the fields that I do not have, but my mind with study, and I can already show you a portfolio as well filled with MSS. as my granaries are in other places.'

When, however, the July sun beat down upon Laurentium, and made it, in spite of the proximity of the ocean, unpleasantly hot, Pliny set out with his wife, his favourite freedmen and a little army of attendants for the cooler heights of his Tuscan estate.



BUST OF A YOUNG MAN FROM PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA (II)

The VILLAS of PLINY

III

WHAT Pliny called his Tuscan estate, now in the province of Umbria, lay within a few miles of the ancient Tifernum, the present little town of Città di Castello. Important excavations were made in the sixteenth century, the period of all the principal archæological research throughout Italy, corresponding to the revival of learning and the awakening of the humanist interest in antiquity. It is natural that a property so carefully described as Pliny's estate should have been easily located, all the more since this great movement was chiefly based on the study of the classics, among which the Elder and Younger Plinies held prominent places. Several inscriptions bearing the name of the owner, and identifying the property beyond doubt, were found among the many treasures which it still contained at that period.

Pre-eminence being given to sculpture, a considerable number of busts formerly adorning niches of the house and park have been preserved, some in almost perfect state. They are in part at the Palazzo Bufalini at Città di Castello, and part at the Castle of San Giustino, near to the Pliny estate, both of which are the property of the Marchese Bufalini, to whose courtesy I am indebted for permission to reproduce here photographs of the most interesting of his collection.

Too careful attention cannot be drawn to the singular

The VILLAS of PLINY

beauty and artistic value of these marble effigies, which are probably among the most perfect and exquisite gems of ancient sculpture to be found in or out of any museum. They are not of course all of equal value or in equal state of preservation, but nothing can surpass the infinite grace and dignity of one of these female heads or the classic perfection of the bust of the beautiful youth, Cæsar or athlete, reproduced here. They have none of the cold rigidity so often found in renaissance sculpture, and brought by Canova to such a degree of perfection in the eighteenth century. They are vibrant with life and poignant in their silence. Unfortunately it is not possible to identify these busts with any security, and we do not know if one of the women we see here was Calpurnia, the wife to whom Pliny wrote such tender and touching love-letters. With the head-dress and draperies peculiar to the first century after Christ, it is without doubt the effigy of a Roman matron, and may well have been that of his wife, or of Pompeia Celerina, his mother-in-law, a remarkable woman for whom he had great fondness and admiration. The other, on the contrary, the wonderful statue with the head bent gently forward in resignation and sadness, is the expression of a mood and significant of an ideal such as one sometimes finds in the busts of Venus. A perfect work of art, it bears an air of such beautiful dignity and repose, and yet so intensely human, that one remains speechless before it. To form



BUST OF A YOUNG MAN FROM PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA (III)

The VILLAS of PLINY

more than a conjecture concerning them would be the greatest presumption; and as much must be said for the others. There exists at the Uffizi in Florence a bust similar to the one marked No. 11, which is catalogued as an athlete. The Roman insignia on the tunic as well as the features of the Bufalini bust, which show refinement and intellectuality, in spite of the physical perfection indicated in the moulding of the breast and shoulders, incline one to conceive it as the idealized portrait of a youthful Cæsar or a member of the Imperial household. It is typical of Greco-Roman ideal portraiture, and were it not for the insignia might be taken for an athlete of renowned beauty and prowess.

As it was customary to have in one's villa the effigy of the reigning prince and those of his family and antecedents who were in favor, it would be quite natural to find them in the home of a man of Pliny's condition. This is no doubt the case of the bust of the other youth with the wistful look upon his somewhat patched-up face.

It is not within the scope of this work to trace the origin of these busts, but only to call attention to their great beauty, which is significant both of the degree of perfection reached by Roman sculpture at the highest period of its development and of the intellectual distinction of the man in whose villa they were found.

In the presence of such admirably preserved statuary,

The VILLAS of PLINY

there can be little doubt that many other relics of his property must have come to light at the same time, such as mosaics, stucco work, marble columns and other important fragments of architecture. These, however, have been dispersed, and no doubt, according to the habit of the century, utilized in the decoration of other buildings. In any event no trace remains, and the soil, which has been abundantly and frequently searched in recent years, seems to have little left to yield. Part of the ancient wall enclosing the vast domain is still in existence, while on the summit of the hill against which the villa was built are the remains of a little temple surrounded by a circular court of mosaic. It is strange that in his letter to Apollinaris Pliny does not refer to it.

Of greater interest than this is the discovery, during a recent tilling of the soil, of what was in all probability a cemetery for slaves. The size of the estate accounts for the fact that this part, remote from the villa, had not been searched before, all the more as no exterior sign indicated it as a place of sepulture. Along a certain line, separated by a distance of ten metres from one another, a great number of skeletons have been unearthed, with a triangular stone at the head of each bearing an inscription. Unfortunately, owing to the ignorance of the peasants and the unpardonable carelessness of the owner of that portion of the land, who, not being able to decipher the Latin inscriptions, broke and scattered these stones,

The VILLAS of PLINY

none have been preserved, while the skeletons, upon exposure to the air, soon crumbled to dust. One in particular aroused interest on account of its gigantic proportions, measuring two metres ten, or over seven feet, from head to foot.

Silence and mystery have such sway over things of the past that it is infinitely regrettable in this instance to be denied the knowledge which only ignorant carelessness has swept from us. However, the great number of skeletons and the simplicity of their sepulture would point in all probability to the conclusion we have mentioned. We have already seen how Pliny lodged his slaves at Laurentium, and we shall learn further on with what solicitude he surrounded them here at the moment of death.

It is often the case that where many treasures forming part of the ancient life have been unearthed, little or nothing is known of their owners, not even their names. Here, on the other hand, where lived a man so prominent as Pliny, and with such a minute description of his favourite villa, little besides the busts has come to us. The fact that the existence of these treasures has been known since the earliest period of excavation, which left the road free for successive centuries of plunder, accounts for this.

We can therefore better appreciate these busts when we realize, apart from their intrinsic beauty, that they are at the same time the only objects that have come

The VILLAS of PLINY

down to us from the home of Pliny, and the most precious that could have been left us. We will bear in mind that they once stood in the spacious cool halls of the villa where we shall now endeavour to follow him, and that two thousand years ago he admired them as we do to-day. It may be of interest to add that if the scenery has lost in luxuriant verdure since the days when Pliny wrote about it, the same abundance of water which formed the chief characteristic and charm of his property, still flows where his gardens once stood.

Much bigger than Laurentium, situated in a spot of the grandest beauty, on a plateau at the foot of the Apennines, it might have been named the garden of limpid waters, for springs, fountains, pools and rivulets meet one at every turn, and with the gentle murmur of their waters increase the solitude of this exquisite retreat.

Less easy of access, as well as on account of its vast proportions, it was not surrounded on all sides with other properties; and from the highest point of its highest terrace nothing interrupted the view over hills and valleys, forests, woods and fields which on all sides but one ended only with the horizon. Down in the valley, at one's feet, the ancient Tiber wound around, seeking its way through the fertile plains. In summer, however, drying up almost completely, it loses its name of great river and disappears until the autumn rains have reinstated it. All around, the hills are covered with



BUST OF A ROMAN MATRON FROM
PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA (IV)

The VILLAS of PLINY

vineyards which supply a rich red wine similar to the Cæcubum so highly appreciated by the Romans. Here Pliny finds repose as nowhere else. Far from all except those intimate friends who are his guests, he is sure not to be importuned or solicited, and could escape for a brief period the thousand duties to which a man of his condition was for ever subjected. 'No need,' he writes, 'even for the toga' and the majestic gravity which it implied. Here, in country clothes, he could give himself up to his favourite pursuit of doing nothing. It was no irksome duty to be delightful host and charming friend, to read and compose in the shady nooks of his park, or in the quiet little summer-house hidden in the woods; and in the autumn, when he was frequently here, hunting came as a pleasant distraction from his other occupations. What exactly these country clothes may have been we do not know. Under the toga, the Romans wore a tunic after the fashion of the Greeks, coming to just above their knees, made of wool or of the finest linen, according to the time of the year, and generally leaving the arms and legs bare. Sandals completed this very practical and in some cases very graceful garment. Over this, in public, the toga was thrown, as no Roman could appear in the street, or before strangers, even indoors, without it. The great aristocrats were authorized to border it with a deep band of purple, as well as their tunics, as distinction of their rank, and it was the only difference that marked

The VILLAS of PLINY

their wearing apparel from that of every Roman citizen, but all the more impressive on the dazzling whiteness and majestic folds of the toga.

The climate was no doubt milder, even in the south, than in our days, and certainly very different from what we are accustomed to in our northern countries. Yet Pliny says that it froze here in the winter, and that the climate was so rigorous that olive-trees could not grow there, nor any of the vegetation with which we associate the Italian sky. For Pliny it was a summer resort, and, situated in the hills, it was always cool, the hottest days being tempered with the breezes from the Apennines. No healthier climate could be found. 'Old people are frequent,' he tells us: 'you find the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of young people still living; one is constantly hearing old stories and tales of the past, so that when you set foot there, you may fancy that you were born in another century.' Two thousand years ago was very up-to-date with Pliny, and in his letters we frequently find him bitterly complaining of the way things were going from bad to worse, of the lack of respect of the younger generation towards their elders, the atrocious administration of people in power, the quantity and quality of 'nouveaux riches,' and the general perfidy of humanity. We find him longing for 'the good *old* days' when everything was perfect, as so many people do at present. He had a weakness for 'antiques' and we



HEAD OF A MAN FROM PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA (V)

The VILLAS of PLINY

find him buying a *genuine old bronze* statue, which, judging by its colour, is *not an imitation*, but of 'great antiquity.' He is, however, duly cautious about it, not placing any faith in his modern dealers, who are an unscrupulous lot and do not hesitate to lead an unwary client astray. Had he lived to-day, he would no doubt have been an insatiable collector of books, and the possessor of a library which would certainly have been worth while.

But we are wandering away from the villa, which was situated at the foot of the hill, with 'as fine a view as from the top.' The greater part had a southern exposure, with a flight of steps leading up to an imposing portico. This corresponded to the porch in an American colonial house, but resembled more the vast colonnade which led to the great villa-palaces of the Renaissance, -- the joy of Piranesi, and which Tiepolo so fondly painted as the background of his frescoes. This was an important part of the house and the life of its occupants. Their interminable philosophical discussions took place beneath its shady roof, and in the cooler hours of the day throngs of guests dispersed themselves between its pillars. They were deep, wide and high, and protected well the inner recesses of the villa from the torrid heat of summer.

Before entering, let us look back upon the gardens which it faced. The land immediately surrounding the villa was laid out in large flower-beds bordered with boxwood, somewhat resembling a French garden of the

The VILLAS of PLINY

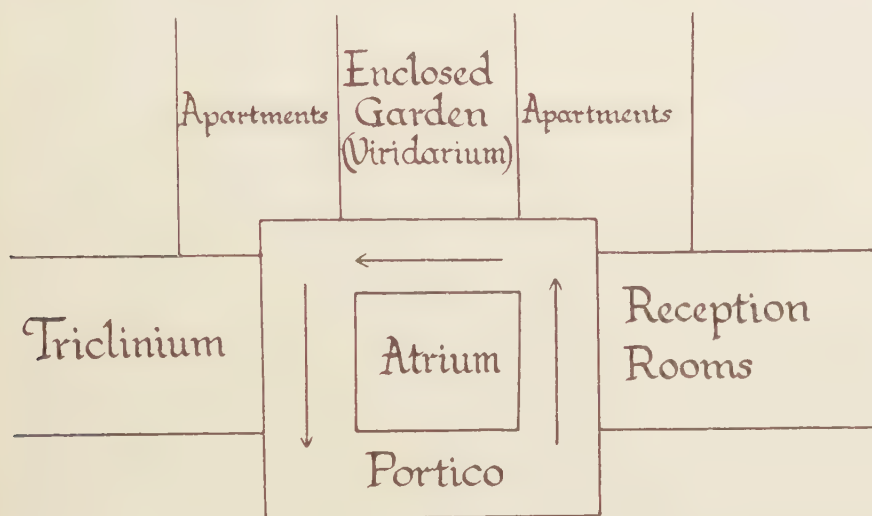
seventeenth century. Beyond these were great lawns sloping down to a 'carpet of acanthus blossoms so soft that they seem almost liquid.' On these lawns were hedges trimmed to resemble curious figures of birds and beasts, in the style of the Roman gardens. All this was surrounded, in the distance, by a semi-circular avenue of evergreens, also trimmed to the shape of various animals: this was the alley reserved for walking. Behind this lay another one, similar but wider, where Pliny took his daily drive. Still further back lay fields, woods and hills stretching to the horizon. One is struck by the regularity with which this park was laid out, by comparison with the lack of symmetry displayed in the villa.

Of the two, this seems to have been the more fanciful in architecture, and the more difficult of which to gather a correct conception. It would appear to have been composed of a succession of wings, skilfully joined together, to unite all the requirements of a highly civilized and fastidious master.

On crossing the mosaic floor, between the columns of the portico, one entered the atrium, the Tuscan atrium, 'ex more veterum' — in the manner of the ancients — as Pliny names it, which has been fully described on a previous page. We can linger here but a moment, by the limpid waters of the impluvium, in which are reflected the snow-white images of the Grecian statues, alternating with the vivid colouring of flowers between them, and

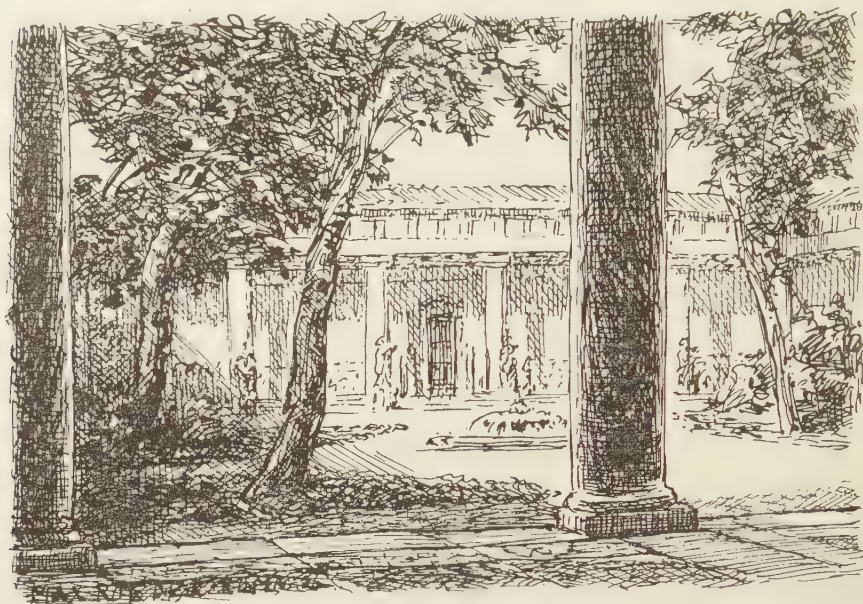
The VILLAS of PLINY

bathed in the diffused light of a heavy purple velum stretched as awning across the opening. Spacious and cool with its running water and marble paving, it was the refuge from the summer heat and a resting place before entering further into the house. This atrium was completely surrounded by a portico which ran not only in the front, but on the sides and at the back. To the right and left it led into different wings of the house, while at the back, facing the entrance, part of it overlooked an enclosed garden. The little sketch below will enable one to have a better idea of how this part of the house was laid out.



The VILLAS of PLINY

This little garden, which the Romans called the *viridarium*, replaced here the more formal *Cavædium* or paved court of the villa of Laurentium, and was much



THE VIRIDARIUM OF PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA

smaller and more intimate. It presented a delightful picture of repose, with four little lawns one in each corner, and on every lawn a plane-tree. In the centre a fountain played into a marble basin. Flowers were no doubt abundant in this little paradise, although Pliny does not mention them, saying only that the waters of the fountain gave a soft and perpetual dew to the trees and what grew beneath them.

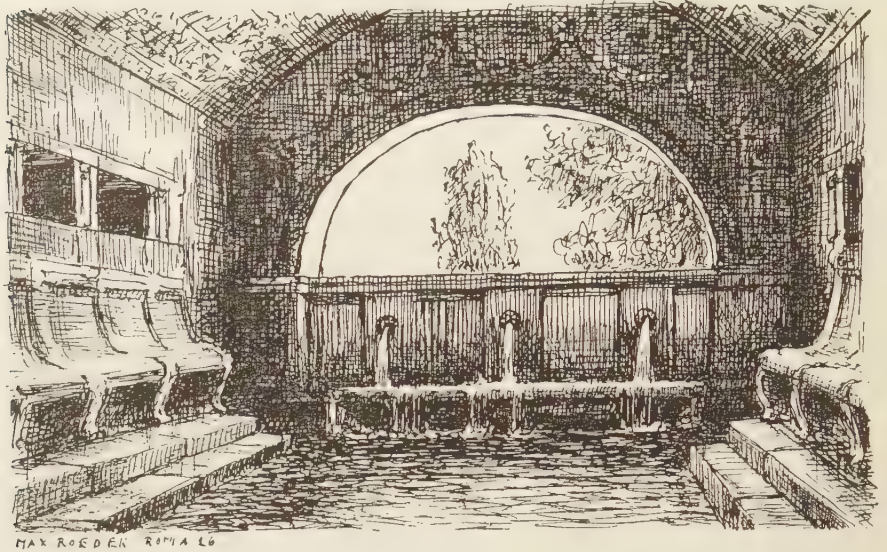
The VILLAS of PLINY

The main body of the house was built around this Viridarium, the four wings jutting out from the corners. In this quadrangle was a bedroom, where no sound penetrated, and which was probably his own.

Next to it was a living-room reserved for the family only, and a few intimates. It overlooked the enclosed garden on one side, and the park on the other. Beyond this lay another room, the mural decorations of which are the only ones mentioned by Pliny in the description of his villas. It was surrounded by marble up to a certain height, and above were frescoes representing birds upon branches, such as are still frequently to be found on the walls of Roman houses. The chief peculiarity of this room was, however, the little fountain which through several tiny outlets poured its waters into a marble vase. Pliny loved its gentle murmur, and as all the springs came from the mountains, its icy temperature, as well as the shade of one of the plane-trees of the court, made it a delightful summer chamber. These are the only rooms he speaks of, in this part of the building. We must leave, therefore, this little garden and return to the atrium, and, passing through the portico on the left, we enter a wing of the house entirely occupied by the triclinium. Like the one which at Laurentium jutted into the sea, this projected into the green of the park. On all sides, like the end of a peninsula, it overlooked the vast grounds, here over flower-beds, there over the valley. Everywhere lawns and flowers met the eye, while in the dis-

The VILLAS of PLINY

tance stood out the forests of the Apennines. It was a very big room, more of a banquet hall than a dining-room, and formed a magnificent suite with the great reception hall which faced it on the other side of the atrium. While the 'salon' we first saw, overlooking the little enclosed garden, was of a more intimate nature,



PART OF THERMAE OF PLINY'S TUSCAN VILLA

this on the contrary, owing to its vast dimensions, could accommodate a great number of people. Situated at one end of the façade with the dining hall at the other, and the atrium in the centre with its pool of water, flowers and statues, it must have offered a beautiful vista when looking from one extremity to the other. This salon

The VILLAS of PLINY

faced on the side a court with a pond. A cascade falling into one end lashed it into foam, keeping it fresh and clean with its limpid current, and it was sometimes also used as swimming pool. A furnace adjacent to this room heated it when, as Pliny says, 'the skies were cloudy.'

In the same wing were the baths, similar to those described at Laurentium, with their cold, tepid and hot rooms, and, though very simple, of extreme elegance. Above was the gymnasium for exercise. Behind these baths was a flight of steps leading into a little hall, off which were three apartments. They were probably guest chambers, and were charming on account of their varied outlook. At the end was a summer pavilion which connected the house with the riding alley. In order to understand the eccentricities in the situation of these different accommodations, we must remember that the villa was in reality a series of different buildings, being on the hill, and that they varied not only in size but also in level. While the atrium with its porticoes and rooms on either side were on one, the apartments overlooking the enclosed garden may have been on another. The little wing just mentioned, as well as the pavilion, was already on the incline, and so was a long gallery enclosed with glass which ran from the first floor to another suite of rooms. In the middle of this gallery was a second dining-room especially pleasant in summer, as, being on the hill, it received the cool breeze of the Apennines. Large windows

The VILLAS of PLINY

opened on to the vineyards, and a little stairway at the back communicated with a subterranean passage beneath it, enabling the servants to bring the food directly to the table without passing through the other rooms. In this part of the villa were two other apartments, containing in all nine more rooms. They were in all probability either guest chambers or the private quarters of the family. Pliny calls them 'cubacula,' the most frequent denomination for bedrooms, which they did not necessarily mean. 'Zotheca' was the name of the place, usually small and often without light, set aside exclusively for sleep, while, *cubiculum*, meant only a small chamber which might well have been adapted to other purposes. Indeed it is often difficult to know what use Pliny made of many of the main rooms, as, apart from the *triclinium* and *atrium*, which had fixed attributes which it would have been impossible to denote in any other way, he does not give them any of the names in use among the Romans to distinguish those assigned to any one purpose.

Here ends Pliny's description of the house. It does not, as at Laurentium, include a mention of the quarters reserved for his numerous escort of freedmen and little army of slaves. It is possible that the opposite wing to the one he speaks of, as well as outhouses, were allotted to them.

One is struck in these letters by the great rôle water



IN A VILLA GARDEN. FROM A PAINTING BY MAX ROEDER

The VILLAS of PLINY

played as a feature of decoration in the Roman villa. Apart from its utilitarian purpose in the thermæ, we find it everywhere throughout the house, in the impluvium of the atrium, in the fountains of the interior courts, in the great marble pools that lay beneath the trees, and often in the rooms themselves, which it kept cool on a summer's day. This of course was dependent upon the amount of water at one's disposal. At Laurentium, where springs are scarce, so also are the fountains and pools. Everything is kept for the thermæ and the household necessities. Here, on the contrary, rivulets and springs from the hills, cascades from the higher peaks of the Apennines, bring more water than even the resources of Pliny can utilize. We shall see, however, with what charming ingenuity he and his gardeners have availed themselves of this natural wealth to enhance the beauty of the grounds that surround them. For in spite of the fondness in which Pliny held the villa, everything is here subordinate to the fascination of its gardens. Its chief feature, and the one in which its owner most delights, is the 'hippodromus.' This vast and beautiful riding park, part of which could be overlooked from one of the apartments in the villa, was narrow in proportion to its length. A straight avenue between a long row of plane-trees formed the first part. Boxwood and laurel bushes filled the space between the trunks, which were covered with ivy and formed an opaque screen of shade

The VILLAS of PLINY

for the rider who passed beneath them. At the end of this, the alley described a semi-circle and disappeared behind a row of cypress to appear again further back. Forming a kind of maze, series of little paths crossed and recrossed the main alley in all directions, sometimes under the dense foliage of overhanging branches, sometimes in the open. Here and there, Pliny tells us, were clearings in the woods filled with roses and flooded with sunshine. Full of surprises, these hidden nooks, bedecked with flowers and heavy with their perfume, tempted the rider to stroll ever further into their recesses. When at last they led him back into the long avenue from where he started, it was to approach a little summer house that stood at its extremity. Before the entrance stood a couch supported by four pillars of Carystian marble which offered itself as resting-place. 'As though from the weight of the person reclining, water spouts from a number of small and hidden pipes,' falling into a marble basin which it maintained full without ever overflowing. At the hour of refreshment, which with the Romans was frequently at hand, this afforded an original and delightful picnic place. The wide edge of the basin became a very convenient table for the heavier plates and dishes, while the lighter ones, made to resemble birds and fishes, floated and circulated on the surface of the water, within easy reach of the guests. Next to it a fountain threw a great jet of water high into the air. The little pavilion was built

The VILLAS of PLINY

entirely of marble, and was three quarters hidden by the woods, from which only its façade emerged. Even this was covered with creepers, above and below the windows and even on the roof. Inside was a big room with all around more couches, and next to each, little rivulets of water filled the air with their murmur. The end of the room was a kind of alcove in which was place enough only for a bed. At its head and feet were windows that on account of the thickness of the vine that covered them, admitted only the softest light. Here Pliny came when he desired to be quiet and alone, and it seemed as he says as if he lay out in the woods, so heavy was the foliage that surrounded the little summer house.

No wonder Pliny prefers this hill-side paradise to all of his other properties. Not all, for Laurentium has the fascination of the ocean at its feet, and Como, the green-wood charm of her beautiful lake. Rather, he prefers *them* to the villas he owns at the more fashionable worldly resorts of Tusculum, Tibur and Praeneste, the summer residences of the court and whirlwinds of dissipation. As at Laurentium, and on the peaceful shores of Lake Larius, here he is far away from a factitious life which, never having cared for, he has long since wearied of. He is free to study and compose, and enjoy, in quietude, a happy family life. But let him tell us how he spends his days there. The Romans were extremely early risers. The

The VILLAS of PLINY

whole population of the imperial capital, from the highest citizens to the humblest, were on foot at the hour of dawn, even before. Men of law, famous orators, great bankers, philosophers and students were all attentive to their tasks, either in the Forum or in private, at an hour when most of us are still asleep. No wonder, therefore, if life began so early in town, that a man as methodical as Pliny, who prides himself on the regularity of his life, should begin his day in the country even earlier than in Rome. 'You ask me,' he writes to Fuscus in the first century after Christ, 'how in Tuscany I spend my summer days. Well, I wake when I feel inclined, usually about the first hour, often before, rarely after.' The first hour corresponded in summer to four o'clock of our time. 'My shutters,' he continues, 'remain closed, for silence and darkness keep me remarkably from all distraction. Free then and left to myself, instead of taking thought from what my eyes rest upon, I visualize my own, for my eyes see only what my mind offers, when they are not distracted by exterior objects. If I have some particular work on hand I devote my thoughts to it, taking pains even as to expression, as though I were writing and correcting. In this way I work more or less long according to what facility I find in composition and memory. I call for a secretary, and after letting in daylight I dictate what I have composed. He withdraws, I send for him again and again dismiss him. At the fourth or fifth

The VILLAS of PLINY

hour, according to the weather, for I have no settled plans, I walk in an alley or under a portico, and continue there my thinking and dictating. I take a drive in my carriage and go on with my work as when in bed or during my walk, for my attention, far from being weakened, is revived by the change.' The first meal of the day, the 'jentaculum,' was taken, as with us, upon rising, and consisted of wine, bread and honey, or bread and cheese, with olives and grapes, according to individual tastes. As one breakfasted so very early, — about four in the morning, — lunch came sooner than with us. Ten o'clock was the usual hour for the 'prandium' as it was called, and although Pliny does not speak of it in his letter, he implies its presence, not only by reference to the hour, but principally by the 'siesta' which he mentions in continuation. Although more substantial than the breakfast, it was nevertheless a very light meal, with eggs and cold meat, or some other simple dishes. After this 'siesta,' which seems to have been the habit twenty centuries ago in warm climates, as well as to-day, Pliny took another walk, during which he read aloud in Greek or Latin, not so much, he tells us, to strengthen the voice as to help his digestion! The remaining three or four hours until dinner time, which was about three o'clock, was spent mostly in his thermæ, in massage, exercise and baths. The cena, it will be remembered, was the principal repast of the day, and lasted more or less long according to hosts

The VILLAS of PLINY

and circumstances. However, as has been said before, none of the extravagance of food so much in favor among a certain class of Romans, and for which the race as a whole has been reproached, ever found its way to Pliny's table. That was reserved for the wealthy freedmen anxious to astound by their display of wealth, or to find favor under a particularly gluttonous Cæsar. Very different is his simple country fare, though excellent no doubt, for in spite of his studies and fondness for the country, Pliny is very much of a 'bon viveur.' One can easily picture to oneself what charming suppers may have been partaken of, around the fountains by the little pavilion, on those long summer evenings, or in the triclinium overlooking the vineyards, with the cool breezes of the Apennines coming down at sunset. 'Afterwards,' he continues, 'I walk with my attendants, some of whom are men of learning, and so the evening is passed away with talk on all sorts of subjects, and even the longest day is soon over.' Frequently also, this is varied by the arrival of friends from neighbouring towns, to spend one or several days, and their visits are a welcome change. 'Sometimes I go hunting, but never without my tablets, so that when I take no game, at least I do not return empty-handed.' Being also the master of big estates, he must occasionally devote some attention to his tenants. Not more, however, than he can possibly help, for they bore him exceedingly, and their 'coarse complaints,' as he quaintly

The VILLAS of PLINY

puts it, only make him revert with more pleasure than ever to his literary pursuits.

We must not deduce that Pliny is always so studious. Inclined at all times to taking himself seriously, when it concerned his literary work this knew no bounds. Convinced that with Tacitus he was the greatest man of letters of his age, it is understandable that anything pertaining to the sacred output of his genius should be treated with all the gravity due to its importance. He has great enough qualities, even as a writer, for us to pardon him this vanity. Perhaps he is a sincerer and a more charming Pliny, when in a letter to Titianus asking him for news he writes, 'As for me, I am leading a most delightful existence: that is to say, I am enjoying complete idleness, the result being that I don't want to write long letters, but I should love to read them.' However, everything is not always so smooth, and Pliny has the same troubles with his domains as a modern land owner to-day. 'I took refuge on my Tuscan estate,' he writes elsewhere, 'to do as I pleased, but even that is denied me, so much am I laden down with the demands and complaints of the peasants, and that is a prose I read with even less pleasure than my own. As to the accounts, I neglect them as though I were absent; sometimes, however, I play my rôle of master in riding around some part of the domain, but even that is only for exercise. But you must remain faithful to your habit and write to a man of the

The VILLAS of PLINY

country all news of the town.' At other times the harvests are bad and wine scarce. 'At the present moment,' he writes to another friend, 'I am busy with my vintaging, picking now and then a bunch of grapes, visiting the wine press, sampling the new wine, and gliding unperceived among my employees of the city, who to-day are giving orders to those of the country, and have left me to my secretaries and readers.' Yet in spite of its drawbacks he was only happy when in the country. When forced to be in Rome his fame and ability at the bar took up his time to the exclusion of all else. 'I have not touched a book nor written a line for so long,' his letter to Ursus, written from the capital, begins, 'for ages already I have known neither leisure nor repose, nor that state of inertia which is not without charm, when one hardly knows if one exists; so much am I laden down with the affairs of my friends which allow me neither the pleasure of retirement nor that of study.' Yet even in Rome Pliny finds occasionally the means of leading a quiet and even secluded life, as we see from a missive addressed to Calvisius about A.D. 109, in which he expresses his opinion of the famous games organized for the amusement of the people, and of the people themselves.

'I have passed all these days in the greatest leisure among my books and tablets. How was that possible, you ask, in Rome? The Circensian games have been taking place, a kind of spectacle that has not the slightest attraction for me. I find no novelty or variety in them,

The VILLAS of PLINY

nothing that is worth seeing twice. It is all the more surprising to me therefore that so many thousands of men should be possessed with the childish desire to see from time to time horses running and men bending over their chariots. If at least it were the speed of the horses or the skill of their drivers that attracted them, there might be some reason for their enthusiasm, but no, it is their colors, and their colors only that find favor with them. If in the middle of the course, during the race itself, the colors should be changed, their enthusiasm would change also, and they would suddenly abandon the drivers and horses whom they recognize from afar, and whose names they shout. Such is the attraction of a cheap tunic; not only with the common crowd, for that is still cheaper than the tunic, but with certain men of position. When I think that they can remain seated without ever tiring of such a stupid, insipid and endless spectacle, I find a certain satisfaction in the thought that what delights them has no charm for me, and it is with joy that I devote to my studies the days which they waste in the most idle occupations.'

One must not judge Pliny as a book-worm disdainful of sport, for as a youth he had been an intrepid soldier, and remained always a good hunter, killing three wild boar in the day, which might win him the esteem of the best sportsmen. Only such idle pastimes as those provided for the amusement of the people provoked his contempt. It was Pliny's greatest sorrow to have had no

The VILLAS of PLINY

children. He married three times, Calpurnia, to whom he refers so often in his correspondence, being his third wife. He seems to have been devoted to her, and one of his letters to her during their rare absences from one another forms a beautiful and touching tribute to the happiness of their union. It was probably when she was visiting her grandfather Fabatus, of whom they were both very fond, that he writes, 'You will hardly realize how your absence weighs upon me. The reason is that first I love you and that secondly we are not used to being separated. That is why I pass the greater part of my nights in sleeplessness, thinking of you, and in the day-time, at the hours when I have been accustomed to visit you, my feet carry me unconsciously towards your apartments, and then sick and sad at heart I turn from the empty threshold, as one who has been refused admittance.'

It is regrettable that we know so little of this admirable type of Roman matron, so very different from the women of the scathing satire of Juvenal and Suetonius. Pliny speaks of her in another letter to her grandfather in terms of the greatest devotion, praising her qualities and attributes, and ends by thanking him in a quaint and charming way, from them both, for the mutual happiness which they owe to him as the outcome of their marriage. Pliny seems to have possessed the rare quality of living on excellent terms not only with his wife's family, but with those of his former wives as well! With Pompeia Celerina, his mother-in-law by his second mar-

The VILLAS of PLINY

riage, he was on a footing of the closest friendship. She was apparently a woman of great wealth and possessed a profusion of villas and estates where Pliny frequently visited her, and was always perfectly at home whenever he fancied a rest from his own. He urges her to make use of his properties as he does of hers, saying that he knows no other difference between them than that he is better looked after in the latter than in his own. Hospitality with the ancient Romans was understood in a much broader sense than it is to-day, and people of the same condition were expected at all times to place themselves and their possessions at the disposal of their friends and to come to their assistance whenever it might be required. Pliny more than all others was proud of these ancient traditions of hospitality, which included not only the reception of, and by, friends, such as we conceive it, but also the charming custom of placing at the disposal of one who was travelling those estates that were on his route, even though the owner might be absent; and when he possessed no residence in the neighbourhood, of writing to friends who had, in order that they might fulfil this courtesy in his stead. In all these villas, a number of attendants were held in readiness for the arrival, at any moment, of the master or his guests.

For his attendants, whether freedmen or slaves, Pliny is full of solicitude and affection, especially towards those who have any culture or intelligence. To all, even to the humblest of his servants, he gives proofs of the greatest

The VILLAS of PLINY

leniency and justice. When his freedman Encolpius, one of Pliny's readers, is taken ill while on a journey with his master, the latter looks after him with fatherly care, has him examined by the best doctors and forces him to rest until he fully recovers. As for Zosime, the actor, another of his freedmen, and a man of culture, who in addition to his profession was an accomplished musician, Pliny is greatly alarmed by the rupture of a blood-vessel during a recital, and as he is slow in recuperating, sends him to Egypt, where he remains for several years. Shortly after his return he is again taken with a slight hæmorrhage brought about in the same way. This time Pliny writes to his friend Paulinus, the owner of a distant estate in a healthy climate, asking as a favor for himself that he may send his freedman there, in order that with the fine air and a milk cure he may have the opportunity of recovery. He entreats him to place his villa at the disposal of Zosime, and proudly adds that he will see that he sets out on his journey with all that befits 'one who is travelling to your estates.' In a very interesting letter to Paternus concerning the illness and death of some of his younger slaves, we see that not only did he accord them their freedom on the slightest merits, but that even as slaves he allowed them to make wills, which although no way valid before the law, Pliny executed in person, to the minutest details, 'obedient as to an order.' In this manner they were able to divide up, in case of death, their little belongings, within the vast household, which was for them

The VILLAS of PLINY

a little city. Not content with showing his humane sentiments to those over whom he holds unlimited sway, he urges his friends to do the same. In a beautiful letter to Saturninus he pleads in a most eloquent and clever manner on behalf of one of the latter's employees who on account of misbehaviour has been dismissed from under his roof, and has sought refuge with Pliny, whom he begs to intercede for his pardon. In a subsequent missive we see that it was not in vain. 'You have done well,' he writes, 'in response to our letter, to have opened again your house and heart to this freedman who used to be so dear to you,' and begs him to be 'lenient to the faults of your people, even when there are none to intercede for them.' Certainly it was not any of those who followed his fine example who needed to fear assassination by their slaves, though it was not infrequent that the sardonic cruelty of certain Romans towards their servants bore its fruit in their revolt, in spite of the terrible punishment which they knew awaited them. Pliny's generosity is proverbial, yet it would not be superfluous to recall here some of those gestures which throw such an interesting light on his character and on a society of which generally only the vices have been pointed out and exaggerated.

Beginning with his nurse, he gives her for her old age a little property worth a hundred thousand sesterces, about four thousand dollars of our money, and in a letter to Verus, one of his household, he urges him to see that the land is cultivated to yield the maximum for her bene-

The VILLAS of PLINY

fit. As for Calvina, the daughter of a distant cousin, who has no other prospect than a succession to a heavily mortgaged estate, Pliny constitutes for her, out of friendship for her father, a dowry of a hundred thousand sesterces. A few years later, when through her father's death she falls a prey to his creditors, Pliny again comes forward, and settles all claims until he is sole creditor. In a beautiful letter, in which he explains that it was his duty to act as he did, and hers to accept it, he hands the estate over to her, freed from all incumbrance, asking in return that she should always maintain intact the honour and reputation of her father.

He bestows on Metilius Crispus, for whom he has obtained the military grade of centurion, a sum of forty thousand sesterces, enabling him to be properly equipped for his new post. Another gift similar to this, only of much greater importance, is the one he makes Romanus Firmus, upon his elevation and admittance as Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Roman Empire. 'You and I were born in the same town, we went to school together and shared quarters from an early age: your father was on terms of friendship with my mother and my uncle, and with me, as far as the disparity in our years allowed.' These and other reasons Pliny invokes to decide him to accept the three hundred thousand sesterces, over twelve thousand dollars, in order that with what he already possessed, he may meet the equestrian qualification.

The VILLAS of PLINY

As a mark of gratitude towards the famous Quintilian, his former master of rhetoric, he adds a large supplement to his daughter's dowry upon her marriage. To Martial, the celebrated poet, his friend, he gives the necessary funds to return to his country, while Artemidorus, the philosopher, is enabled through Pliny's generosity to reside in safety abroad, after his exile from Rome.

He was never tired of asking favors for others, even from the highest, and as governor of Bithynia, in the last years of his life, his correspondence with the Emperor Trajan contains many demands of recompense for those in need. For every rank, from a citizenship to be conferred upon a freedman, up to the advancement in honours to men of high office, Pliny intercedes for the Imperial favor, which was never refused him. The intimacy and confidence of so great and noble a man as the Emperor Trajan speaks well for the character of Pliny, and these letters, which include many of the Emperor's replies, are an invaluable testimony to the justice, peace and spirit of kindness which reigned throughout the empire under his rule.

Pliny's public bequests are as important as his private ones. Being a native of Como, and having had a special fondness for its beautiful lake, he left the town a million sesterces, approximately forty thousand dollars, for the foundation of a public library, with an annuity of a hundred thousand towards its upkeep. A half million more was given for the education of the children of the poor

The VILLAS of PLINY

of both sexes. His will is full of charitable bequests and thoughts for those around him. The city of Como, in addition to his previous munificence, received after his death, four hundred thousand sesterces for public baths, while for his freedmen he left over eighty thousand dollars. As Richard Bagot so justly says in his interesting and delightful book '*The Lakes of Northern Italy*,' Pliny was only one example among countless others that have been handed down to posterity, that charity and thought for the wants of others were not, as is so often preached, prerogatives of Christian teaching.

As has been said before, the probable date of Pliny's death was about A.D. 113, when he was still governor of Bithynia. We find no trace of him after this, and no fragment from his pen. It would appear highly probable, had he been living at a later period, that his correspondence would have continued, and that some mention of his existence would have come down to us. However, there is on the other hand no known document relating to his death, and even if we conclude that it must have taken place at the time mentioned, which would have been in his fiftieth year, we do not know where. Did it overtake him in Bithynia, in the service of his country, or was he spared to realize his dearest wish, that of ending his days in the peaceful atmosphere of the country, surrounded by his wife and faithful friends, in one of the beautiful homes of which he was so fond?



3 5132 00261 4501

University of the Pacific Library

Harte
The villas of
Pliny

